

The Learning MarketSpace, December 1, 2000

Written monthly by Bob Heterick and Carol Twigg, *The Learning MarketSpace* provides leading-edge assessment of and future-oriented thinking about issues and developments concerning the nexus of higher education and information technology.

ANY PATH WILL DO

As traditional colleges and universities feint, dodge, weave, stumble and sometimes fumble in their move toward the incorporation of technology-based learning strategies, a sort of Alice in Wonderland aura permeates the educational landscape—if you don't know where you are going, any path will do.

We sometimes wonder if our traditional institutions of higher learning have seriously stopped to consider the likely outcomes of the increasingly significant infusion of computer and communications technology into the teaching/learning process. If they had, it would be difficult to explain some of the choices being made. There is an element of wisdom in the old technology maxim, "It only took God six days to make the heavens and the earth because he didn't have an installed base to worry about." New, commercial entrants in the higher education market currently have the edge precisely because they don't have an installed base to worry about. Our long-established institutions, while not necessarily moribund, suffer from the inertia of several hundred years of tradition that make change on any significant scale exceedingly difficult.

As the focus shifts from teaching to learning, a number of changes will become increasingly obvious. Just as the student will become more responsible for his or her learning outcomes, we can expect the student to become responsible for setting his or her educational agenda.

There are certainly historical antecedents for this. It was well into the 19th century before an established curriculum, leading to a four year under-graduate degree, became the norm. Prior to that time, and even into the 20th century, it was not uncommon for students to pick and choose courses at the university and, when they felt themselves ready, to leave with letters of recommendation from various faculty that they felt would open the necessary doors to a long and rewarding career. In today's world, the number of university drop-outs who have created the engine that fuels our booming economy is legend. It hasn't escaped observation that Microsoft has created many more millionaires from its staff roster than has the National Football League from its.

All this may signal the resurgence of the professorate. Educational institutions have long struggled with the limited allegiance of their faculty who, especially in the case of research institutions, have been focused more on their professional discipline rather than their employer of record. New organizational structures to deliver learning opportunities with technology seem likely to further exacerbate this long standing concern. Just as the marginal farmer, who could provide subsistence for his family and a few others, has shrunk to near invisibility, so too will the lecturer who can provide a learning opportunity for only 50 or 100 students at a time. Those faculty (more likely teams of faculty) who can provide compelling learning experiences for literally thousands of students may become like successful researchers and football coaches and their staffs—greatly in demand and following the money.

As the student takes increasing responsibility for his or her education, it seems likely that the funding which has been directed to the institution will begin to shift to the student. We have a little taste of this with the beginning of state scholarship funds directed to the student and with the rise of state support for secondary students in charter and private schools. We hear rumblings in the legislatures of several states about funding the consumer rather than the provider and there is clear evidence that significant amounts of federal educational support are beginning to follow this model.

Directing support to students rather than institutions will increase the aggressiveness of potential commercial competitors. Unencumbered with the inertia confronting our traditional institutions, they will be formidable competitors. Unlinking financial support from a formal degree would further pressure educational institutions who eschew learning opportunities outside their degree curricula. Enrollment competition—which has generally been an issue only for second tier, high cost, private institutions and institutions in states with declining or only marginally growing populations—will become a major issue for all but a few high prestige institutions. Many traditional institutions will find themselves "over built" in terms of bricks and mortar. Maintenance of an under-utilized physical plant could become a significant competitive deterrent for some.

The more significant issue may be the potentially precipitous decline in the number of students actually seeking the four-year undergraduate degree. Life-long learning and job re-skilling are likely to be the goals of the vast majority of people pursuing post-secondary learning experiences. It seems likely that three-quarters of the

enrollment in post-secondary learning will not have degree expectations or intentions. Fewer than one-fourth of all current students are seeking the "undergraduate experience" as a full-time, residential student. That percentage can be expected to continue to diminish.

For the majority student, credit-for-contact is of little import but certification of learning is critical. To accommodate this majority, we can expect to see an increased emphasis on outcomes assessment and a decreased focus on seat time. As more and more regional and statewide asynchronous learning institutions such as the Western Governors' and Kentucky Virtual universities come into existence, the rise of credit banks and transfer-of-credit agreements should be expected. While conferring a degree on a student who has never set foot on the campus, or possibly never completed a course taught by the institution, is a specter that haunts most traditional institutions, new providers can be expected to emerge to meet student demand for certification.

The comfortable rhythm of the 15-week semester will be shattered. Students will begin the study of a "course" at anytime and will finish at anytime. Traditional institutions of higher learning will be confronted with scheduling issues that boggle the mind. Student progress and "eligibility" will require new definitions. These are not new problems to the dot.com world, but our traditional institutions of higher learning are not necessarily adept at operating in Internet time.

If you think you know where you are going, the path really does make a difference.

—RCH

BACK TO THE FUTURE

In our [March 2000](#) issue, we waded in on one aspect of the intellectual property controversy: whether or not faculty-developed online course materials represent potential gold mines for colleges and universities.

While expressing a considerable amount of skepticism about this possibility, we observed that the promise of a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow is framing the debate over who owns various kinds of intellectual property at virtually every college and university in the country. The struggle between faculty and administrators over this issue is creating a destructive atmosphere of fear, anxiety and anger on our campuses at a time when we need to pull together to meet the many challenges facing us.

That phenomenon was forcefully brought home to me a week or so ago at the League for Innovation's Conference on Information Technology where I gave a presentation based on the Pew monograph, ["Who Owns On-Line Courses and Course Materials: Intellectual Property Policies for a New Learning Environment"](#). At the conclusion of that session, a faculty member who teaches at a community college in the South West came up to me to report the following:

"Our administration says they own anything we put on any college server. What do you think I'm using to teach these days? Paper and pencil and a textbook!"

Is this faculty member alone in his resentment?

Let's assume that most institutions want to encourage faculty participation in technology-based instruction. How are we going to persuade faculty to devote the considerable time, thought, creativity, and energy demanded by the development and delivery of technology-based instruction if the institution plans to take possession of any course materials as soon as they are produced? In our view, institutions need to ensure faculty members that the results of their investment belong to them, not to the institution. Otherwise, there is little incentive for a faculty member to make that investment. Moreover, such a stance may be a serious deterrent to faculty engagement.

This is true whether or not the materials are considered to have commercial value. Nearly every expert on the subject has the same opinion: it is unlikely that even a small percentage of faculty or institutions will experience any commercial success whatsoever from the sale of online course materials. The agreed-upon estimate of those that may be successful is less than 1 percent. Just as most faculty members' lecture notes do not become successful textbooks (although with help from a good publisher, some do), most online materials will be used for the purpose for which they were created: educating the institution's own students.

Even if an institution believes that such course materials are likely to have commercial value, denying faculty both ownership and royalty rights will surely pose problems in motivating faculty to produce the materials, since good materials require a lot of work. Those faculty who are able to share in the commercial success of their work will have a greater inclination to create them in the first place. Most observers of the scene believe that there are more than enough obstacles in the way of persuading overworked and underpaid faculty members (certainly in their view) to convert their courses to an online environment. Aren't professors who invent a better way to teach on-line or learn through technology making a contribution to the betterment of education and, in the process, fulfilling their commitment to the institution? Why would we want to throw additional impediments in their way? Shouldn't our institutions be the catalysts in encouraging faculty to devote their energies to improving education for all?

More liberal policies will incent faculty to more actively pursue the creation of original on-line course materials. We believe that generous and forward-thinking institutions will offer attractive incentives to their faculty to develop online course materials and the freedom to market their unique creation to others and reap the rewards. To be sure, a small number of faculty members may hit a home run. Why not wish them well?

Suppose Harvard had tried to own the results of Bill Gates' undergraduate interest in the microcomputer? Would he have underwritten that \$25-million building?

We need to remember that colleges and universities are non-profit organizations and do not operate on the corporate model, which is bent on gaining the highest-possible return on investment, evaluated through the use of price/earnings ratios and similar productivity measures. Questions about the desirability of forming for-profit subsidiaries or affiliates to undertake course production or distribution can be expected from all of higher education's stakeholders. Colleges and universities measure their value and worth by the quality of educational experience they provide, by the nature of the research they generate, and by the service they provide to their communities. Institutions of higher education, in our view, should be focused on upholding their responsibilities to their equivalent of shareholders: faculty, students, alumni, and citizens of their states.

Our March column concluded by asking, are we really going to look the faculty in the eye and say, "We used to let you own your course materials, but that was before we realized there was money to be made off them."

Surely one of the most demoralizing things an institution could do would be to change its intellectual property policy by saying, "If it's on paper, you own it. If it's electronic, we own it."

What's wrong with this picture?

—CAT

UPCOMING LEADERSHIP FORUM EVENTS

STATE-OF-THE-ART LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS: PEW GRANT PROGRAM IN COURSE REDESIGN ROUND I RESULTS

February 26, 2001, Dallas, Texas

Co-sponsored by the Executive Forum in Information Technology at Virginia Tech

This seminar will present the results of the first of three rounds of the Pew Grant Program in Course Redesign. Learn from faculty project leaders how to increase quality and reduce costs using information technology. Faculty from four institutions will talk about their models of course redesign, including their decisions regarding student learning objectives, course content, learning resources, course staffing and task analysis, and student and project evaluation. These models provide varied approaches that demonstrate multiple routes to success, tailored to the needs and context of each institution.

These seminars provide a unique opportunity for you to:

- Learn firsthand how to increase quality and reduce costs using information technology from successful faculty project leaders.
- Find out how to design learning environments for the future by tapping the expertise of those who have done it.
- Talk with experienced faculty from multiple institutions about how and why they made their redesign decisions.
- Move beyond "today" and learn where on-line learning is going . . . find a model that will work for your institution.

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